

DOSSIÊ PSICOLOGIA, POLÍTICA E SEXUALIDADES: CRISES, ANTAGONISMOS E AGÊNCIAS

**Child as Method as a Resource to Interrogate Crises, Antagonisms and
Agencies**

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I discuss the peculiar ‘agencies’ attributed to the child/childhood under neoliberalism as a symptom of its crises and antagonisms, with a focus also on practical struggles and solidarities such analyses might promote/afford. Specifically, the theme of this Special Issue aligns with an approach I have named ‘Child as method’, which analyses the geopolitical dynamics and intersections performed and resisted by practices around children and childhood. I will start by outlining key starting points for the discussion that follows, such as the relation between the child and (neo)liberalism, and the child as a site of consumption/display. I outline the ways the child, as a cypher for the modern late capitalist European subject, has been aligned with imperialism, colonialism and extractive racial capitalism as a particular reading of Freud’s ‘His Majesty the Baby’. Following this, I explore a range of subject (including affective) positions accorded children (which children themselves may sometimes occupy), as an expression of Child as Method’s commitments to map how ‘child’ reflects and contributes to transnational geopolitical dynamics, in the service of identifying new subjective possibilities and relations.

Keywords: colonialism, racial capitalism, development, narcissism.

Criança como Método como um Recurso para Interrogar Crises,

Antagonismos e Agências

RESUMO

Neste artigo, discuto as “agências” peculiares atribuídas à criança/infância sob o neoliberalismo como um sintoma de suas crises e antagonismos, com foco também nas lutas práticas e solidariedades que tais análises podem promover/oferecer. Especificamente, o tema deste dossiê se alinha com uma abordagem que denominei “Criança como método”, que analisa a dinâmica geopolítica e as interseções performadas e resistidas pelas práticas em torno das crianças e da infância. Começarei delineando pontos de partida para a discussão que se segue, tais como a relação entre a criança e o (neo)liberalismo e a criança como um local de consumo/exposição. Descrevo as maneiras pelas quais a criança, como uma cifra para o sujeito europeu do capitalismo moderno tardio, esteve alinhada com o imperialismo, o colonialismo e o capitalismo racial extrativista como uma leitura particular de “Sua Majestade, o Bebê” de Freud. Em seguida, exploro uma série de posições (inclusive afetivas) de sujeito atribuídas às crianças (que às vezes as próprias crianças podem ocupar) como uma expressão dos compromissos da “Criança como método” para mapear como a “criança” reflete e contribui para a dinâmica geopolítica transnacional, no serviço de identificar novas possibilidades e relações subjetivas.

Palavras-chave: colonialismo, capitalismo racial, desenvolvimento, narcisismo.

El Niño como Método como Recurso para Interrogar las Crisis, los

Antagonismos y las Agencias

RESUMEN

En este artículo, discuto las peculiares "agencias" atribuidas al niño/la infancia en el marco del neoliberalismo como síntoma de sus crisis y antagonismos, centrándome también en las luchas y solidariedades prácticas que tales análisis podrían promover/permitir. En concreto, el tema de este número especial se ajusta a un enfoque que he denominado "El niño como método", que analiza específicamente las dinámicas y intersecciones geopolíticas realizadas y resistidas por las prácticas en torno a los niños y la infancia. Comenzaré esbozando puntos de partida clave para el debate que sigue, como la relación entre el niño y el (neo)liberalismo, y el niño como lugar de consumo/exhibición. Describo las formas en que el niño, como una cifra para el sujeto europeo del capitalismo tardío moderno, ha sido alineado con el imperialismo, el colonialismo y el capitalismo racial extractivo como una lectura particular de 'Su Majestad el Bebé' de Freud. A continuación, exploro una variedad de posiciones de sujeto (incluidas las afectivas) otorgadas a los niños (que los propios niños a veces pueden ocupar), como una expresión de los compromisos de Child as Method para mapear cómo el 'niño' refleja y contribuye a la dinámica geopolítica transnacional, al servicio de identificar nuevas posibilidades y relaciones subjetivas.

Palabras clave: colonialismo, capitalismo racial, desarrollo, narcisismo.

The Child and Liberalism Relation ¹

Firstly, I want to address the relation between conceptions of the child and liberalism. The rise of interest in childhood coincides historically and culturally with the formulation of the individual self with interiority. As Steedman (1995) highlights, the alignment of the affective stance – that has now come to be taken for granted – towards children and childhood, as indicators of our lost/better selves, arises in the particular cultural-political context where biology and psychoanalysis were being formulated (from eighteenth century Europe onwards), separately and also in relation to each other. On this point, psychoanalysis is understood to be concerned with the past turned inward, inside the subject, and biology aligned with the heteropatriarchal and colonial project of mastering ‘nature’ and correspondingly generating ‘natural hierarchies’, as McClintock (1995) highlighted early on (see also Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Taylor, 2013).

This self that the child is aligned with, or even – as Steedman (1995) writes – personifies, is, of course, also the imperial self – in the sense both that Freud (1914/1957) wrote about the narcissism of the subject as ‘His Majesty the Baby’ and also of the co-constitution of modernity, which might better be called racial capitalism (Bhattacharyya, 2018), with colonialism. Many feminist historians and other anticolonial theorists have highlighted how the heteropatriarchal bourgeois family, of the father ruling benignly over his wife and children, not only mirrored but also formed part of the rationale for paternalist colonial rule, including both occupation and exploitation of labour and resources (Lugones, 2010; Vergès, 2021).

The Child and Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is, of course, merely a subsequent turn in capitalism, albeit one that intensifies and perhaps shifts some points of emphasis. In relation to the regulation of children and childhood, the modernist agendas of surveillance and ‘catching them young’ are extended into concerns with maximisation and optimisation. Far from being helpless, or incompetent and so dependent on others – whether on the state or their more intimate sociopolitical and interpersonal ‘environment’ –, now the child is ‘smart’, well equipped, and active (Millei, 2011). This reflects the shift away from a welfare state approach of provision of services and support (if there ever was one) to a social investment model where one earns one’s entitlement to these (if indeed such entitlements exist at all) (Moss, 2014).

The child emerges, therefore, as the quintessential ‘agile’ subject of neoliberalism, or of what might better be called late capitalism; flexible and adaptable, and – perhaps especially – as a temporary state (see also Vassallo, 2021). (After all, low rates of pay for child labour have long been justified by virtue of being deemed both ‘educational training’ and time-limited, notwithstanding its socially and often economically necessary character). This brings me to the next point.

The Child as a Site of Consumption/Display

A third position to be explored is how the child is also a site of both display and consumption; that is, how it is both object and subject in these capitalist relations. This brings to the fore the role of the child within affective capitalism, which is a particular feature of neoliberalism (albeit sometimes rather confusingly called ‘cognitive capitalism’). As the discussions of ‘emotional labour’ highlight, neoliberalism is marked by the move away from industrial manufacturing to service sector, with the shift to working on and with relationships, rather than more directly material ‘commodities’. Clearly, though, as the marketing and advertising industries know well, relationships, that is, both our relationships with others and with things, are materially important – in the sense of making money. In that sense, our feelings and our relationships, ‘authentically’ experienced as they may be, are further sites for economic exploitation. Late capitalism is a psychosocial, psychoaffective matter.

Children are no exception here, in various ways. As objects of display, children’s clothes and possessions now form a key canvas onto which class and cultural privilege are inscribed and demonstrated. Still more, mobilising the discourse of social investment – on the part of the state and of parents –, children’s bodies and activities form a key site for these axes. Perhaps ‘brain gym’ has replaced, or rather supplemented and now precedes, piano lessons in the middle- or upper-class display of child accomplishments and abilities, with the children’s performance as an indicator of class status. Of course, children do not escape recruitment into such consumption and activation practices. Indeed these perhaps function as one of the few available culturally sanctioned outlets for constrained children’s self-expression. Various commentators have also noted how children, especially young girls, have been catapulted into fame and fortune through their shopping and grooming activities online (Gill-Peterson, 2015). They may be ‘influencers’ in the new expanding markets that young people tantalisingly offer, but they are also subject to the influences they advertise.

As a key illustration of the relational co-constitution of positions around/through the child/childhood, there is the subjectification of parents, as also the other industries of professionals (including, of course, psychologists). For example, I was recently interviewed by a US-based parent who hosts a parent education website called ‘Your parenting mojo’². As I discussed with her, what the name of her site highlights is how the activity of parenting is no longer only an occupation or a question of labour. Rather, what this indicates is how there are additional subjective imperatives to enjoy and keep enjoying doing this work. One has to not only care and care well, but also do it with creativity and charisma. Interestingly, lots of psychologists and psychological advice is mobilised on the site to support this view. (Naturally, the website ‘owner’ has a child psychology background too). The work of parenting has extended under neoliberalism, therefore, beyond one of protection and provision, and even education for democratic citizenship, along the lines that Adorno et al.’s authoritarian personality studies proposed as characterising the post World War II condition (see Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). Now, expressions of parental engagement are continuous, and require continuous monitoring and updating. After all, Adverse Childhood Experiences are proliferating and their explanatory power to account for all later social ills seems limitless (Edwards et al., 2019). At the very least, this promotes a convenient miniaturisation of the social into the family that erases the socio-political contexts in which families and communities live and struggle to prosper and survive (White et al., 2019; Edwards et al., 2016).

To summarise my general argument so far, I’m suggesting that, in a way, the position of the child highlights the rotten bargain offered to (neo)liberal subjects: protection without rights; ‘vulnerability’ without support/care, advocacy or representation. Further, in terms of the role of psychology, its increasing popularity and inscription within social policy highlights its function as a tool for both management and self-management, as well as (imperatives towards) self-‘care’.

Having outlined these starting points, I now want to move on to delve deeper into the dynamics of representation and, in particular, that of ‘protection’ surrounding children. More specifically, to interrogate who is protecting what, and whom.

Beyond the Imperial Self (“His Majesty the Baby”)

In his 1914 paper ‘On Narcissism’, Freud writes of narcissism as part of an affective structure that tries to recapture the supposed (reconstructed, recollected) fantasy of idealised childhood. In this well-known account, he writes:

The child shall have a better time than his parents; he shall not be subject to the necessities which they have recognized as paramount in life. Illness, death, renunciation of enjoyment, restrictions on his own will, shall not touch him; the laws of nature and of society shall be abrogated in his favour; he shall once more really be the centre and core of creation – ‘His Majesty the Baby’, as we once fancied ourselves. The child shall fulfil those wishful dreams of the parents which they never carried out—the boy shall become a great man and a hero in his father's place, and the girl shall marry a prince as a tardy compensation for her mother. At the touchiest point in the narcissistic system, the immortality of the ego, which is so hard pressed by reality, security is achieved by taking refuge in the child. Parental love, which is so moving and at bottom so childish, is nothing but the parents' narcissism born again, which, transformed into object-love, unmistakably reveals its former nature. (Freud, 1914/1957, p. 91)

So, the child functions as the narcissistic object (of enjoyment, protection, achievement) of and for the parents, “the parents' narcissism born again”. This narcissism, of course, not only is forged from adult responses to unmet desires or challenges, but also bears the traces of the societal conditions in which those challenges were encountered. We can see it in Freud’s elaboration of the heteropatriarchal lines of fantasy investments on the part of the parents, as also in his summary epithet “His Majesty the Baby”. Here it should be noted that, since this phrase was cited in English in Freud’s original German text, it is thought to be a reference to a “well-known Royal Academy picture” (as the footnote puts it) that Freud knew and wrote about elsewhere, indicative, the footnote continues, “of the Edwardian age, which bore that title and showed two London policemen holding up the crowded traffic to allow a nursery-maid to wheel a perambulator across the street” (Editorial Fn to Freud, 1914/1957, p. 91). So here is a staging of class and gender relations, enacted in or from an imperial, colonial centre, exemplifying a parental fantasy of aristocratically high birth or at least designating one for their offspring. If the child of liberalism is an expression of the imperial self, and in some

ways the neoliberal child even more so, how do we move beyond this imperial self? It will take some deliberate reflection to decolonise the models of childhood inscribed in our desires as well as our textbooks. Let me try to consider this further.

His – Majesty? It seems that the neoliberal subject is feminised, while the formerly triumphal androcentric position is now presented as endangered and threatened. While this does not, of course, mean that development has suddenly become pro-feminist, it does mean that feminist discourse has been co-opted to serve capitalist and colonial hegemonies. It could, in any case, be argued that this threatened, fragile masculinity is precisely what feminist psychoanalysts have long asserted as a driver of individual development. We must continue to ask: whose or which masculinity is being protected? And what work do such gender distinctions do to secure those subjectivities (and socio-political objectivities) (see also Lugones 2010)?

Majesty – This is a useful reminder of how, as Chen (2010) asserts, de-imperialisation is a key part of the decolonial project. This involves disarticulating the presumed alignment between the baby, primary narcissism and the western, heteropatriarchal colonial project.

...the Baby – Here we need to acknowledge that, of course, the child, or the baby, is not singular, is not a ‘the’ or an ‘a’. The epistemic violence structured into that abstraction recapitulates the political economic violence of the global north over the south.

(My) Developmental Stories: From Deconstructing to Pluralising to Geopolitical Diagnostic

Clearly, dominant accounts of childhood have worked in favour of global hegemony of the North, portraying as general what are very particular, if at all actual, norms and conditions of children’s lives. So the question arises: what alternative resources can be mobilised? Many authors have documented the diversities of childhoods lived across the world, and the challenge to make better policies and practices (e.g. Imoh & Ame, 2012; Mitakidou et al., 2009; Lee & Vagle, 2010). As part of this decolonial project (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2007), which must also be a reflexive enterprise, I would like to rehearse here something of my own intellectual trajectory in addressing and attempting to challenge such epistemic violence and the suppression of diversity done in the name of childhood and development.

Firstly, in formulating the project of deconstructing developmental psychology (Burman, 2017), I discussed developmental psychology as a key form of psychology, and

how it functions as an indicative practice of modernity and its exploitations and exclusions. However, finding this somewhat static and inattentive to specific cultural reformulations and even resistances, the second move I then made was to shift from *deconstructing* the dominant discourse of development to attending instead to *diverse and plural* forms and relations of development (Burman, 2021), including both the diverse links and disjunctions between children and policies and practices around national, international and economic development. Helpful as this relativizing approach proved to be in some ways, as a corrective to a too-totalizing hegemonic account, I came to see it as (in parallel with critiques of discussions of “multiple modernities”, Bhambra, 2007) vulnerable to the charge of insufficiently addressing the complex histories and power relations that have produced such diverse developments. While this is no small agenda, there is now also an important literature emerging on childhood and nation (Millei & Imre, 2016) as well as critical discussions around the impacts of taking the nation as the unit of cross-national study, as instituting a kind of ‘methodological nationalism’ (Chernilo, 2008) that both homogenises diversities within the nation state and also overstates differences across states in essentialist and unhelpful ways that suppress analysis of their interconnections.

So, a third approach, currently in progress, starts from an understanding of children and childhood as a key site to read and act in relation to wider geopolitical axes of power (Burman, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). This is an intervention in relation both to childhood and to educational studies, that also has significant consequences for psychology. Its project is both to connect up with wider social currents and political debates and also to intervene in social and political theory to understand how deeply the child exemplifies and is a key agentic dynamic in wider axes and relations. I have called this Child as method – resonating with other key texts in cultural studies, i.e. *Asia as method* (Chen, 2010), and in migration studies, i.e. *Border as method* (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013).

My book *Fanon, education, action: Child as method* (Burman, 2019a) takes Frantz Fanon’s writings as a particularly fruitful *corpus* of texts to excavate and reflect upon for its range of representations of children and childhoods. As a psychoanalytically-informed practitioner, Fanon accorded childhood experiences a formative role in both producing and constraining agentic political possibilities of adults. He opens and closes *Black Skin White Masks* with a phrase (that – interestingly – he attributes to Nietzsche but actually apparently comes from Simone de Beauvoir): ‘Man’s tragedy, Nietzsche said, is that he was once a child’ (Fanon, 1952/1970, p. 9) (the last citation is only a slight variation: ‘the tragedy of the man is that he was once a child’, Fanon, 1952/1970, p. 165) What I think Fanon is alluding to,

here, is how our childhood experiences of vulnerability and helplessness shape our responses in later life, and in particular how these may limit the subject's receptive and engagement capacities, as well as – consistent with his psychoaffective attention to materiality and embodiment – how geopolitical conditions impact on subjectivities. As a revolutionary as well as a psychoanalytic practitioner, Fanon's writings indicate the paradoxical agencies both attributed to and as wielded by child/children/childhood. This is alongside acknowledging the necessary or inevitable vulnerabilities or limits structured into our lives by having been children; that is, of having had a past. It is these responses to historical, socio-politically situated embodied experiences that lay the basis for a commitment to change, or – alternatively – to resist change; in psychoanalytic terms, the compulsion to repeat the past mistakes, so tying the psychic to the political.

I distinguish four different kinds of 'child' in Fanon's writing. First the **'Idiotic' child**, taking the term 'idiot' in its original Greek meaning as 'separate' or away from the social bond. Reading Octave Mannoni's (1969/2003) influential account of the workings of ideology, in his essay "I know well but all the same", alongside Fanon's anticolonial analyses, I read Mannoni against the grain of his discussion to consider the significance of the fact that the paradigm example he offers of the mechanism of disavowal, that is, of remaining committed to beliefs that we know to be untrue, is that of lying to children. I suggest that keeping children ignorant, innocent or – in this sense – 'idiotic' functions to protect adults' cherished convictions, convictions that we know to be false but nevertheless cannot let go of. This is what, in psychoanalytic terms, is called disavowal, the refusal to recognise a truth that one has wilfully set aside. According to the influential analysis originally formulated by the psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni (and later popularised by Slavoj Žižek and others), this is the dynamic that sustains the workings of ideology. Significantly, children – or rather the position of the child as addressee – figure in Mannoni's essay, and I trace through various twists and turns, as well as paradoxes, contradictions and, yes, plenty of racism and sexism in his otherwise very generative discussion. Suffice to say, here, that the kind of convictions Mannoni highlights is that which we are precisely so quick to try to 'protect' children from. These convictions include such mantras as: everyone is heterosexual, all children are happy, God will look after us all, if you work hard you will get what you deserve etc.

I have dwelt on this "first" child, Idiotic child, as I think it captures so clearly some of what is at stake in the sociocultural subscription to a particular – and perniciously, but patently false – notion of childhood. This illuminates further what is at stake in the conception of the imperial self, of His Majesty the Baby. This is a notion that particular, embodied,

historical, chronological children can only fail to exemplify, and so they emerge as insufficient or deficient, or even pathological and unnatural (and so acquire their own narcissistic injuries in part because of this, perhaps). This analysis helps us understand that it is precisely when people seem most passionate about but most unable to interrogate, or account for, their deeply held convictions (about children and childhood) that potent ideological work is being done. Ideology is, of course, about the social in the psyche (and vice versa), a necessarily both collective and individual matter. I suggest that, as soon as one starts to pressurise this hard-to-articulate and often sentimentalised commitment to children, other adult-focused issues come to the fore. It is relevant to recall here that Winnicott (1949), in his famous 1949 essay 'Hate in the countertransference', specifically mentioned sentimentality as something that is of no use to children, and indeed he argues that sentimentality actually covers over a *failure* of engagement, a deep *insincerity*, that children are especially sensitive to but that (I suggest) they suffer the consequences of in myriad political, cultural, institutional as well direct interpersonal ways. We need to take children seriously, and – sometimes – perhaps that means forgetting that they are “children”.

I identify three other kinds of children in the book as indicating how Child as method works. So, secondly, the child figure most closely associated with the reception of Fanon's writings is the white boychild who, as the cypher of the French colonial state, hails him as black and as an object of fear, that is, blackens or racialises him, and so institutes the trauma of racialised injury. This injury is psychic, shocking and transforms the subject's sense of themselves; it is also physical, in the felt 'discovery' of bearing vilified, stigmatised physical characteristics, a 'discovery' that disrupts and hideously mutates the subject's connection with their body; and clearly, since this is how it was initiated, it is also interpersonal and relational: as enacted in a visuo-spatial scene. In *Black skin, white masks*, Fanon (1952/1970) describes the sense of being ejected from the field of intersubjectivity, of being rendered a non-person.

I find it interesting that little attention has been paid to how this iconic and famous, or infamous, scene of traumatic installation of racialised injury was instigated, supposedly, by a child. In this sense I call this child the **Traumatogenic child**, the child who institutes the sociopolitical and psychoaffective trauma of racialisation. Yet on closer inspection, it is unclear whether or how much Fanon attributes direct intentionality to the child, or even his mother (who tries, unsuccessfully, to mitigate the insult to Fanon). Such ambiguity of agency is, I suggest, fruitful territory for analysis. In Fanon's account, the child is neither the origin of this racialised insult (the chapter opens by quoting the same racialised insults, but these are as yet unattributed), nor is 'he' (that is, the boychild) without responsibility. Rather, it is the

encounter with the child that inflicts the trauma of racialised injury as the site of everyday ongoing and recurrent racism. Fanon's focus lies in evoking the chain of symbolic associations and the trajectory of rumination this encounter with racism sets up, depicting a sequence of affective responses, from disbelief to hurt, to rage, to taking on the mantle of blackness, to returning to the encounter angry and ready to retaliate.

This is where Fanon ends the chapter, and it is often where commentators leave this discussion. Yet by the end of the book he has thoroughly deconstructed (as we would now say) claims of commonality on the basis of blackness to favour instead a radical humanism that dispenses with the very categories of white and black. Of course, radical changes in favour of justice and political transformation are needed for such a project of transcendence of racialised categories to be possible. My analysis here concerns the child, its agencies and those of its mother (who I suggest not only inflames the problem but also offers a way back into some kind of intersubjective relation, albeit one that is structured around Fanon mobilising his sexism to oppose her racism). Hence I try to explore this scene in terms of possible antiracist and emancipatory pedagogies, and their affective features.

Also in the book (Burman, 2019a), I discuss two other kinds of 'child' figuring in Fanon's text, as also elsewhere. As space is limited, I will be brief. The third figure, **Therapeutic child**, appears in one of Fanon's case histories in his dramatic and painful document of the psychological fallout of colonial and anticolonial struggle in *Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 1961/1963). This is the story of 'B', an Algerian taxi driver commandeered to drive for the Algerian resistance, whose wife is raped by French forces in part to try to force her to disclose his whereabouts. The child that figures in the narrative is the photograph of his baby daughter. It is the man's account to Fanon of his response to this photograph that prompts the unravelling of his story, and that narrating this to Fanon, the clinician, his therapeutic process. Yet what is also interesting here is that in fact the child is not the subject. Rather the child stands for, is metonymically linked to, other gendered/sexed/colonial violences inflicted on adult parents that limit their current – political, personal and sexual – potencies. The child here stands for the adult's psychological development. So, while there is a developmental narrative here, of personal development (towards healing and better relationships), significantly, this qualifies the adult, not the child. The question arises, therefore, what this indicates about children's agencies.

So far, therefore, the three kinds of child in Fanon's writing – as exemplars of occurrences elsewhere too, surely – concern what the child does *for others*, rather than being concerned with the child or children themselves. It is only a fourth child, that I have called

Extemic child (to mobilise a Lacanian inflection), that exercises its own intersectional and relational inter(and intra-)actions. This child is both inside and outside the social, like the Möbius strip that characterises the subject's imbrication within the social. This is where Fanon reverses as well as reiterates dominant child motifs, with his reversals clearly arising from his revolutionary imagination and struggles. It is only this out of the four child positions that actually concerns the position and actions of specific embodied historical children.

Final Comments

In this paper, I have taken Fanon's writings as one possible, but significant, account of the crises, agencies and antagonisms available to disrupt hegemonic narratives of children and childhood. Clearly, there are more models and positions of childhood that could be identified and discussed. Nevertheless, the analytic approach is one of working through *which* kind of child gives rise to what kinds of positions for all the parties around that child, or children, and *who* its attributed characteristics and actions actually qualify, with *what* effects (and affects).

I will finish by pointing out that there are two related but different projects at play here. I have used Fanon's corpus of writings as a significant (and acutely politically charged) arena for the investigation for models, or tropes, of childhood. As well as, hopefully, promoting a renewed attention to Fanon's work, and its relevance to childhood studies, I see this as also a specific example of a wider project, Child as method, that I discuss in the final chapter of the book and elsewhere (Burman, 2018, 2019b, 2019c, in press).

Clearly one does not need Child as method to read Fanon (although I hope Fanon scholars gain something from this particular set of readings). Equally, Child as method, as a way of understanding childhood as a geopolitical diagnostic analytic, extends elsewhere across disciplines and issues (see also Meiners, 2016). Indeed, I am already working on other 'applications', exploring practical – empirical and methodological as well as analytical – aspects, including in material culture and biographical memorial accounts.

A relevant example of this work perhaps is the postsocialist childhoods project (Silova et al., 2017; Burman & Millei, 2022). Under state socialist rule, as in the West, children were also a major site of intense scrutiny, recruitment and manipulation. Yet (as is the case elsewhere too) the lived lives of children neither directly reflected those political development projects nor were they entirely encompassed by them. The postsocialist childhoods project has generated an archive, or rather an ana-archive (since it is not organised in conventional hierarchical ways to confirm as pre-arranged narrative or position), a wide resource that is

documenting adult recollections of growing up in Communist states ³. The accounts are marked by the present, of course, as well as offering a key narrative record of the past, and it is this interplay that makes these memorystories (as we are calling them) so very interesting. (Perhaps the post-dictatorship Brazilian context also offers a similarly fruitful site of inquiry too).

So, to conclude, in this article I have suggested a particular way of reflecting on how and why psychology, gender and sexuality remain key authoritative narratives governing children and childhoods, and by which we construct, interpret and regulate them. These practices are key sites of struggle for and with children, and also of solidarity with them. I have tried to show how dominant models of childhood not only reiterate hegemonic axes of power and oppression, but also – notwithstanding the privilege notions of childhood exercise – they disempower children too. The next task is to forge joint intergenerational alliances to change the world, together.

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Notes

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² See <https://yourparentingmojo.com/captivate-podcast/ddp/>

³ Available at <https://coldwarchildhoods.org/memories>

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